CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Prison-Bottleneck Timber Sale
Proposed:	
Implementation Date:	June 2021
Proponent:	Montana State Prison in conjunction with DNRC Anaconda Unit.
Location:	8 miles west of Deer Lodge, Montana
County:	Powell

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Montana Correctional Enterprises, Prison Ranch is proposing harvest of approximately 1,000 MBF of Douglas-fir from approximately 400 acres of Prison owned land within T8N, R10W, Sections 8, 16 & 17. Additionally, there would be approximately 5000 tons of other material harvested as part of this proposed treatment.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project. List number of individuals contacted, number of responses received, and newspapers in which notices were placed and for how long. Briefly summarize issues received from the public.

Scoping involved contacting adjacent landowners, other agencies and special interest groups.

During the comment period, comments were received from the FWP, USFS and Anaconda Sportsman's Club.

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

Examples: cost-share agreement with U.S. Forest Service, 124 Permit, 3A Authorization, Air Quality Major Open Burning Permit.

MT FWP – 124 Permit.
MT DEQ – Open Burning Permit

3. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT:

Describe alternatives considered and, if applicable, provide brief description of how the alternatives were developed. List alternatives that were considered but eliminated from further analysis and why.

Action – The action alternative would harvest Douglas-fir from approximately 400 acres to promote overall stand health. In addition to forest health improvement, existing roads that do not meet the standards set by Montana's Best Management Practices would be maintained and/or improved through culvert replacement, installation of drainage features and surface blading. Highly eroded, short segments of rough road in the harvest units would be covered with slash and grass seeded or water bars installed to reduce erosion.

No Action – The no action alternative would not augment Douglas-fir densities throughout the project area. Roads not meeting Montana's BMP standards would not be improved or maintained. Highly eroded, short segments of rough road in the harvest units would not be covered with slash and grass seeded or water bars installed to reduce erosion.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to soils.

The Prison's Bottleneck project area is located on moderate slopes consisting of soils that are moderately to well suited for timber harvest according to the Web Soil Survey. Areas with prolonged slopes over 45% would be avoided or harvested with appropriate harvest methods.

Soils are susceptible to rutting and compaction if operated on when wet. Erosion potential is moderate and erosion can be controlled by standard drainage practices. No wetlands were identified in the harvest units, and where there is surface water, SMZ law guidelines would be adhered to.

The No-action alternative would be similar to existing conditions and have little effect on soil resources. There would be no ground disturbing impacts from timber harvest operations or road construction/maintenance and no additive direct, indirect or cumulative effects.

Implementation of the Action alternative would harvest timber on approximately 400 acres. The analysis and levels of effects to soil resources are based on implementation of the following practices, rules and mitigation measures to minimize soil impacts.

- Harvest would implement all applicable BMP's, SMZ adherence, and reasonable mitigation and erosion control practices during timber harvest, road maintenance, and road construction and road use activities.

- Limit harvest equipment and hauling operations to periods when soils are relatively dry, (less than 20%), frozen or snow covered to minimize soil compaction and rutting, and maintain drainage features. Check soil moisture conditions prior to equipment start-up. Portions of the access roads have clayey segments that tend to remain wet later into the spring and requires strict adherence to dry or frozen season of use to limit impacts in harvest units or damage to roads.

- On tractor harvest units the logger and sale administrator would agree to a general skidding plan prior to equipment operations to limit trails to 15% or less of the harvest unit. No equipment would operate on sensitive sites in the SMZ. Limit ground skidding equipment to slopes less than 45% on the short steep slopes. Feller-bunchers may work on slopes up to 45% as long as displacement and turning is minimized to prevent excessive disturbance.

- Target fine slash and woody debris levels would be set at 0-5 tons/acre well distributed on site while meeting the requirements of the slash law. Slash may be placed on main skid trails to protect soils and reduce erosion potential unauthorized ATV use as needed.

Based on implementation of BMP's and the planned mitigations and comparison to harvest monitoring of similar projects, a moderate risk of direct impacts and low risk of in-direct or cumulative effects to soils would be anticipated with implementation of the Action Alternative.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to water resources.

Rock Creek flows through the project area. Additionally, there are other water features that would be afforded appropriate protection under Montana's SMZ Laws and Rules. Harvest would not occur within the SMZ

boundary of any stream or lake, however, harvest may occur along irrigation ditches. Any harvest that would take place inside the SMZ would adhere to *Montana's Streamside Management Zone Laws and Rules* and *Montana's Best Management Practices*. Stream crossing issues would be mitigated in accordance with an FWP issued 124 Permit (SPA-38-14 R-2).

The no-action alternative would be similar to existing conditions and have little effect on water resources.

Based on implementation of BMP's, SMZ laws and requirements of the 124 Permit, there is a low level risk of direct, in-direct or cumulative effects to water quality or quantity. The analysis and levels of effects to water quality and water resources is based on implementation of the following practices, rules and mitigation measures.

* Operations would implement all applicable BMP's, and reasonable mitigation and erosion control practices during timber harvest, road maintenance, and road construction and road use activities.

* Forest Officer would locate, clearly mark and maintain suitable Streamside Management Zones (SMZ's) adjacent to streams and wetlands.

* Road use would be limited to dry or frozen ground conditions to reduce rutting and erosion. The Forest Officer should check snow/frozen ground conditions prior to operations. Minimal effects are expected with snow road construction.

* An existing crossing that does not meet BMP's would be mitigated.

* Mitigation of stream crossing issues would meet BMP's and requirements of the FWP 124 permit issued for this project for erosion control and stream protection.

Cumulative Watershed Effects of No-Action Alternative would be similar to current conditions.

There would be low risk of adverse cumulative impacts from the proposed action, to water quality and beneficial uses based on implementation of BMPs, SMZ laws and mitigation measures during timber harvest and road reconstruction operations. Selective harvest of trees in the 400 acres of harvest units would not have a measurable effect on water yield or stream channel stability compared to no action.

---

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced (i.e. particulate matter from road use or harvesting, slash pile burning, prescribed burning, etc)? Identify the Airshed and Impact Zone (if any) according to the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to air quality.

A minor amount of particulate would be created when the slash piles are burned. All burning would be done in accordance to DEQ regulations.

---

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to vegetation.

No rare plants or cover types were found, however, Idaho sedge is a Species of Concern in the project area. The over story of the proposed treatment area is dominated by Douglas-fir.

No Action – No harvest. Conditions would remain similar to current conditions.

Action – The proposed project area was historically under a low intensity high frequency fire regime which created a more open stand than what is present today. The action alternative would thin the Douglas-fir, leaving nearly all of the mature, large Douglas-fir found on the site. This type of treatment would retain characteristics

which are indicative of historic and desired future conditions. No un-acceptable direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts are anticipated as a result of the proposed action alternative.

WEEDS
Spotted knapweed and Houndstongue occur along roads and in the area and are likely to slowly expand in the area with no-action.

With the action alternative, mitigation measures would be implemented to control existing noxious weeds along roads and to prevent introduction of new weeds, off-road equipment will be cleaned prior to entry into harvest areas. Newly disturbed roads and landings will be seeded to grass to reduce the spread of weeds. Noxious weed spread would not be greatly increased by this action or cause cumulative impacts to vegetation based on the mitigation measures.

---

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:
Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

Terrestrial Wildlife
The project area provides habitat for a variety of wildlife species. Deer and elk likely use the project area much of the non-winter periods; elk winter range exists in the project area. Under the action alternative Douglas-fir would be harvested leading to more open areas in portions of the project area. This would alter habitats for wildlife species requiring mature forested conditions, while creating habitats for species needing more open stands. Additionally habitats for species that utilize snags could be reduced. Thus, a low risk of adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to species requiring mature forested stands, big game, or snags would be anticipated with the proposed activities. ***(The complete Species of Concern list can be found in the project file.)***

Aquatic life and fisheries
A fisheries survey (2009) has been completed for streams in the project area and it has been determined that it provides habitat for a genetically pure strain of westslope cutthroat trout. No harvest would occur inside the SMZ boundary of any stream and any harvest that may be done along irrigation ditches would be done in accordance with the SMZ Law and BMP Guidelines. Substandard crossing of streams would be mitigated and roads would be brought to Montana's BMP standards. Based on implementation of BMP's and planned mitigations there is low risk of direct, in-direct or cumulative effects to aquatic life or fisheries or wetlands.

---

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:
Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

Terrestrial Wildlife
According to the Montana Natural Heritage Program, the project area may contain potential habitats for Species of Concern. The proposed activities could cause slight shifts in use by these species where present, however, no key habitat components are known to exist in the project area and long-term use by any of these species is not expected to appreciably change. Limited potential for use of the project area by wolverine, fisher great blue heron and long billed curlew exists. No changes to use would be anticipated with the proposed activities. Thus, a low risk of adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would be expected to occur with the proposed activities. ***(The complete wildlife SOC list can be found in the project file)***

Fisheries
A fisheries survey (2009) has been completed for streams in the project area and it has been determined that it provides habitat for a genetically pure strain of westslope cutthroat trout. No harvest would occur inside the SMZ boundary of any stream and any harvest that may be done along irrigation ditches would be done in accordance with the SMZ Law and BMP Guidelines. A substandard crossing of streams would be mitigated and

roads would be brought to Montana's BMP standards. Based on implementation of BMP's and planned mitigations there is low risk of direct, in-direct or cumulative effects to aquatic life or fisheries or wetlands.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

DNRC Archaeologist, Patrick Rennie was contacted. There are no known archaeological sites in the project area. As such, no cultural resource concerns associated with implementation of the project are anticipated.

11. AESTHETICS:
Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to aesthetics.

The area is approximately 12 road miles from the city of Deer Lodge. Spacing of leave trees would create negligible impacts to aesthetics from the city. Primary use of the area is during hunting season. No un-acceptable impacts are anticipated with either alternative.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:
Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to environmental resources.

N/A

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:
List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

NEPA work may be done for an adjacent project on National Forest lands in the future.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:
Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

None identified.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

The project area is currently utilized for grazing and would continue regardless of either alternative. Reduction in crown cover would likely increase grass production.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:
Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to the employment market.

The proposed project would create employment for one logging company for approximately two months.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:
Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

No measurable impact has been identified with either alternative.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:
Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

None identified.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:
List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

The proposed project is in accordance with the Management Plan created for the Prisons timber ground.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:
Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

The road system through the harvest area can be used to access National Forest lands. Primary use is during the general hunting season.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:
Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to population and housing.

N/A

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

N/A

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

N/A

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:
Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

N/A

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Sean Steinebach	Date: 4/13/2021
	Title: Service Forester	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

The action alternative is the selected alternative. The proposed project has a low risk of negative or un-acceptable impacts.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

There would be a low risk of negative or un-acceptable impacts from implementation of the action alternative.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐ EIS ☐ More Detailed EA ☒ No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name: Gayle Butler** **Title: Montana Correctional Enterprises Administrator/Land Manager** **Name: Brian Robbins** **Title: Montana DNRC – Trust Lands Forester**
Signature/Date:	Ron Wagner MCE Agriculture Director 10/13/2021
Signature/Date:	B S Robl 10/13/2021